

Transcript of remarks of press conference on anti-epidemic measures

The Chief Executive, Mrs Carrie Lam, held a press conference on anti-epidemic measures this morning (March 30). Also joining was the Secretary for Financial Services and the Treasury, Mr Christopher Hui. Following is the transcript of remarks of the press conference:

Reporter: Good morning. Mr Hui, this month, a business chamber survey showed half of the European firms (in Hong Kong) are considering leaving next year. Unlike Singapore, we have no roadmap to normalcy, you know, what CEO (chief executive officer in a company) is going to come in for a seven-day quarantine (just) for a meeting or conference? Some say the adjustments to travel rules are too little, too late to save the city's international status. What is your message to the businesses who are leaving?

Second, Mrs Lam, on TCM (traditional Chinese medicine), yesterday you said the use of Chinese medicine in curing the infected COVID-19 patients has proven to be very effective on the Mainland. Can you share which medicines you're referring to? And, in terms of sending out TCM to particularly older residents, do you think there is a fear of disincentivising them to get vaccinated if they prefer TCM? And finally, you said last week that the next administration can review the "Omicron crisis", but many on your own side blamed you for inaction last year with the highest death rates in the world and 7 000 dead. At the end of your tenure now, have you any regrets on COVID or things you would do differently? Thank you.

Chief Executive: I'll answer the last two questions and then Chris could supplement on the situation of the business sentiment.

About the use of traditional Chinese medicine, this is not something new in Hong Kong. Being a predominantly Chinese community, many of us actually use Chinese medicine at various stages of keeping ourselves healthy or for the rehabilitation purpose. In tackling COVID-19, our focus is now on preventing critical illness and preventing deaths. As I have just mentioned, so far in our public hospital system, the mainstream is western medicine. We don't even have one single Chinese medicine hospital. We are building one in Tseung Kwan O, but we do not have (one right now). There is a certain degree of application of Chinese medicine on a very small scale in our public hospitals, but the fact is the development of Chinese medicine in Hong Kong has been constrained by many factors because of the history. But it doesn't mean that it is not effective. In the Mainland of China, I was told by the experts and I have read a lot of literature on how they are able to cure critically ill COVID-19 patients. There was a figure given to me yesterday but I couldn't recall it now. There are many serious and critical cases in various provinces during the last two years of the epidemic that have been treated effectively through application of Chinese medicine and the experts whom we have invited to Hong Kong will certainly give us good advice on this.

We already have two weeks' experience of some Chinese medicine practitioners curing and looking after patients, especially elderly patients, at the community treatment facility at AsiaWorld-Expo.

You asked specifically about sending traditional Chinese medicine to all residents and whether this would disincentivise vaccination. The proprietary Chinese medicine tablets that we are sending in the anti-epidemic bag to all the households in Hong Kong are for treatment. It's just like Panadol or paracetamol, it's not for prevention. So vaccination remains the most effective means to prevent an infected person becoming seriously or critically ill. There is no contradiction whatsoever between the two missions. One is to give Hong Kong residents some sort of safeguards: when they fall ill, they could have paracetamol, they could have this proprietary Chinese medicine to cure, especially if they have mild fever. The second mission is to continue to encourage vaccination, especially amongst the elderly and the young. And this is very welcomed: I have to tell you that the proprietary Chinese medicine is very much welcomed by the people of Hong Kong whenever we go out to distribute the supplies donated or given to us by the Central Government.

We are all saddened by the large number of fatalities in this epidemic. That's why we are doing our utmost in order to safeguard the health and safety of Hong Kong people. We have a long list of measures that we have introduced, improved and enhanced in order to safeguard the health and safety of the elderly people and we will continue to do so. This is at the moment one of our priorities and we will continue to spare no effort in helping the elderly to save their lives.

Secretary for Financial Services and the Treasury: Thank you, Chief Executive. In response to the questions regarding what are the messages that we want to convey to the business community, I think there are two.

Firstly, in light of this COVID-19 situation which is the global phenomenon, I think, similar to every other jurisdiction, we are doing our part on various fronts to deal with it.

In response to many of the comments that have been made by the business and in particular the financial services sector regarding some of the measures that we put forward, I think, as highlighted by the Chief Executive, we have announced a series of streamlined measures that are just highlighted. Based on our frequent interactions with the business and commercial sectors, they are very much welcomed and well received. So, on that basis, adhering to the overall principle in terms of our anti-pandemic efforts, we will continue to make sure that the comments made by the sector including the emphasis on connectivity with the Mainland and the rest of the world and also their comments made regarding schooling and other aspects of people's lives will be taken care of as we chart the way forward. That's number one.

And number two, another key message I want to convey is regarding Hong Kong being open to business. It is because after all if we look at the place where people or companies try to locate their businesses, definitely

opportunities and talents are the key. And on that count, based on what I just introduced at the outset on the various measures we put forward to broaden the development scope of our sector and at the same time to nurture our talent pool, I think all these efforts will continue and will also continue to be strengthened in such a way that Hong Kong will continue to open to business to the rest of the world.

(Please also refer to the Chinese portion of the transcript.)